

Book Reviews

The Mother-Daughter Project: How Mothers and Daughters Can Band Together, Beat the Odds, and Thrive Through Adolescence.

SuEllen Hamkins and Renee Shultz.
New York: Hudson Street Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Pegeen Reichert Powell

The “Mother-Daughter Project” of the title of this book refers to a group of mothers and daughters that the authors founded with five other mothers when each of their daughters were around seven years of age. Based on the conviction that “other mothers and daughters are one of the most powerful resources you can draw upon to help you safely shepherd your daughter through adolescence,” the group met regularly until the time of publication, when the girls were around seventeen (xviii). The mothers also held mothers-only meetings, both to offer mutual support as mothers and to plan the mother-daughter get-togethers. As a result of the authors’ speaking engagements, similar mother-daughter groups have since formed around the world. This book serves as a resource for women who are interested in starting a group of their own, as well as an accessible guide for other mothers facing their daughters’ adolescent years.

Part one describes the research on which the group was founded. One chapter is devoted to the challenges facing daughters, another to the challenges facing mothers. What follows is an examination of the central tenet of the book: that separation or disconnection between daughters and mothers is neither necessary nor natural to a girl’s development, a view that challenges a psychological assumption that has been reinforced by popular culture. The authors posit instead that mothers and daughters should strive for “mother-daughter mutuality” and a relationship in which both are empowered. Such a relationship, they suggest, is best fostered within a group of like-minded mothers and daughters. Since it is increasingly rare that extended families provide such a network of support, the authors offer instruction in how to create such a mother-daughter group.

Part two of the book is best described in the authors' own word as a "curriculum." Chapters seven through seventeen cover the corresponding year in daughters' lives. Topics such as friendship, menstruation, body image, safety, and sexuality are covered at ages when they are most applicable to the girls' experiences. Each chapter provides background information on these topics and suggests the types of conversations and activities in which the mother-daughter group could engage to explore these topics together. While I had difficulty imagining myself engaged in some of the suggested activities, I was convinced by the proposition that I could intentionally involve other women in the raising of my daughter.

Although Hamkins and Shultz are psychotherapists, their book often reads like a self-help book. Notably absent from the book are fathers, although that is understandable given the nature of the project. More problematic, however, is the absence of any discussion of how such a group could address the problems facing minority and/or poor mothers and daughters. For example, the chapter on body image focuses on appreciating women of all sizes and shapes, with no discussion of skin colour or hair types. Since all the women in the authors' own mother-daughter group were working professionals, this book will be most helpful to readers who are interested in starting their own group—and who have the time and resources to do so.

Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler and Preschooler: The Ultimate No-Worry Approach for Each Age and Stage

Ann Douglas.

Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons, 2006.

Reviewed by Sonja Boon

I first encountered the work of Ann Douglas as a prospective parent. Her humorous and down-to-earth approach drew me in: rather than prescription, admonishments, and mother-blame, her work offered relevant insights and information culled from a combination of scientific evidence, recognized parenting theories, and, most importantly, the experiences and words of a legion of actual parents, all presented in a positive manner.

This approach characterizes Douglas's latest book, *Sleep Solutions for Your Baby, Toddler and Preschooler*. Douglas, a seasoned writer whose published books now number twenty-eight, here discusses one of the most common challenges of parenthood: infant, toddler, preschooler—and, as she stresses, parent—sleep. Douglas does not venture into unexplored territory; indeed, the parenting literature on infant and toddler sleep is immense and includes such